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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that organizations have cultures that can be described and that this descriptive data may be used prescriptively. Basic cultural components include customs, collegial relationships, competency, and confidence. This study investigated whether or not school level has any relationship to cultural norms (for example, whether elementary schools have cultural norms different from junior high schools cultural norms). The intent was to provide disaggregated data by school level to reflect descriptive differences and similarities in the culture of schools as noted by levels. The study sample consisted of self-selected schools that desired to use the Cultural Analysis Questionnaire (CAQ) to describe their existing school culture for purposes of school improvement. Data were collected from three states (Oklahoma, South Dakota, and New Mexico) and represented 33 elementary schools, 10 junior high/middle schools, and 14 high schools. The study encounters distinct differences among the four clusters and respective norms for the three levels of schools examined. Results of t-tests performed on the data indicated that each of the organizations vary significantly from the one another. Data collected support contentions voiced throughout the years by educators who have indicated that high school teachers tend to be more isolated from their peers and may not share experiences with their colleagues. School administrators must be aware of areas of agreement and disagreement among staff members, and they must have data to help the organization accomplish the journey desired. Contains a table of cultural norms for schools, results of t-test analysis, and 15 references. (BT)

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An Examination of Organizational Culture in Public Schools

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An Examination of Organizational Culture in Public Schools

Introduction: School Culture and The Focus on School Improvement

School improvement efforts of the nineteen eighties and nineties rely heavily on the involvement of members of the school organization in a team effort which examines the school organization and then collectively plans for improvement. However, very few improvement models lead the educational system to a higher plane which provides a platform to examine the "Big Picture' of the organization. The power of shared decision-making or participatory management is not an invention of modern society. Theory provides insight about the power of participatory decision-making in organizations. Getzels and Guba (1957, p. 429) presented a classic model that depicted two components present in every organization: the Nomothetic Dimension represented the people in the organization and the Ideographic Dimension represented the organization itself. The model visually displayed the primary concern which must be addressed in all organizations: people who comprise the organization must work in the framework of an organization. The two dimensions illustrate the potential avenues for disastrous conflicts. People have individual goals but the organization has organizational goals; people have a set of individual expectations whereas the organization has a set of needs or requirements; people have individual personalities- while the organization has particular roles which must be played. The task of management leadership was purported to be that of somehow aligning the two dimensions.

Common top-down management techniques focus only on the "organizational" dimension of the Getzels-Guba model. The strength of the current educational reform effort toward

accountability is the demand that the organizational improvement be accomplished by involving both organizational and individual dimensions. Improvement is to be accomplished by sincerely involving, at the planning stage, those who are to implement the decisions.

The power of shared decision-making goes far beyond the theory of the Getzels-Guba model. Whenever people are involved in the decision-making process, pathways to primal roots have been traversed. Early humans first came together in groups and established particular ways of doing things based on how efficiently they could exploit their environment. From this pattern of accepted behavior the first organizational culture was developed. The human being, in the most basic nature, is a social group animal. Every group still establishes patterns that are unique and meaningful to their specific needs. The most integral element in the pattern that the group creates (and then is controlled by) is the membership's shared beliefs. Very rarely does the group realize the existence of its own belief structure, but this belief structure is the most powerful "controller" of any group. It is the essence of what makes any group distinct from any and all others. The collective unwritten structures come together into what social scientists now realize as the "organizational culture" of a group.

Organizations may be strengthened by understanding and modifying normal reactions to events within the organization. In order to internalize a concept for an entire organization the shared belief system of the members of the organization, the organizational culture, must be affected. Efforts for meaningful change must focus on Organizational Culture.

What is Organizational Culture?

Culture is defined by Gibson et al. (1985) as a unique system of values, beliefs, and norms that members of an organization share. Deal simplistically defines culture as an abstraction that ties to the unconscious side of the organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Culture consists partially of recurrent and predictable behavior patterns (Firestone & Corbett, 1988). Culture is an organizational habit. There is a well-developed congruency of thought and sameness in the way things are done. Educational corporate culture is simply an extension of the description of corporate culture into the educational setting.

All organizations, educational or otherwise, develop a culture which guides and directs the particular way organizational members do things. All groups formulate beliefs, values and thoughts unique to their specific organization. The extent to which the beliefs, values and thoughts are shared is one component of the culture of an organization. However, it is not enough to have a high degree of belief and attitude congruency. If the group membership is not working toward organizational goals and components necessary to effect high-level operation, congruency becomes a mute, or even harmful, component, ie. too many members neglecting or going in the wrong direction..

There are basic cultural components found in every organization (Saphier and King, 1985). An understanding of the following components will allow the reader to plan for changes in the way things have always been done, thus impacting the culture of the organization:

1. The Induction of new members through a focus on **Customs:**

   Shown by a mutual effort (a) to communicate Staff Expectations, (b) to protect

What is Valued and Important, and (c) to focus on Student Traditions and Common Customs;

2. Maintenance of the organization through: **Collegial Relationships:** *Encouraged by (a) Recognition, (b) Celebration, and (c) Open Communication;*

3. Pushing the Envelope: Risk taking to improve **Competence:** Demonstrated by (a) A Grasp for New Knowledge/Technology, (b) Tangible Support, and (c) Experimentation; also, **Confidence**: *demonstrated by (a) Trust, (b) Decision Making Involvement, and (c) Open Communication.*

Examining the past--moving to the present.

Customs: staff expectation, protection of what is valued and important, a focus on tradition and custom.

Every organization came from somewhere. Even if the organization is brand new there is a body of beliefs upon which the system is based. What are they? Do staff members know what those beliefs are? Do they really know what is expected of them? Unless employees are told about important and unimportant issues it is not fair to expect them to infer, by intuition or ESP, what the leader has in mind. The right questions have to be asked and the right answers have to be made if we are to mold our organizations into stronger and more successful entities.

In all organizations there are expectations, traditions and customs through which can leaders mold culture. Leaders must identify those components from our past which exemplify the essence of our organization and use them to help work through present problems. In instances

where much of the past needs to be discarded, one must communicate the right message and do away with the things of the past that hinder the trip forward.

Indoctrinating for the present--maintenance of the organization.

Collegial Relationships: recognition, celebration, and open communication.

By recognizing the achievements of the organization and collectively celebrating small and large victories as they are achieved, it is possible to build a stronger and more cohesive work group. It is almost impossible to examine any current literature which addresses organizational improvement and not find a great deal of attention paid to the importance of group decision-making. A general consensus appears to be that attention must be paid to the maintenance of the organization as an organization--members must recognize, celebrate, and communicate on a regular basis.

Induction programs are a vital part of indoctrinating new members to the values of the system. Standard procedure is to use the induction program to assist in recognition and celebration and to use the time to communicate the messages deemed to be important. If new employees do not understand what is important and why it is important they will be less willing to go the extra mile to help achieve the organizational goals. The goals of the organization must become internalized by those who work in the organization. Good induction allows for the process to successfully begin.

Communication is a key element for organizational survival. An examination of the formal and informal communication network is vital. Hidden hierarchies exist within your organization and must be identified, and leaders must know how to use those hierarchies to advantage.

Rewards and sanctions are the visual display of what is considered of value and importance. Who and what are/are not recognized communicate a great deal about the values held by the organization. Appropriate behavior is usually rewarded by some type of inclusion and sanction by the group. Sanction is also given for inappropriate behavior; however, the sanction is usually exclusion or withdrawal of acceptance by the group.

Planning for the future--change and progress.

Competence and Confidence: A grasp for new knowledge, support, experimentation and trust, decisions-making involvement and open communication.

Freedom to choose pathways through a mine field will at least make the traveler think about what is near by and examine options before taking the next step. Freedom for employees to examine the circumstances surrounding their work and then actually make decisions which impact their work will provide the same commitment to a decision. Two questions should be asked and answered honestly and forthrightly: Are your employees challenged to try new ways or explore new paths? Is there support for staff to try new things? Remember, support does not have to be financial support; it may be allowing mistakes to happen or doing a little path-clearing through the mine field. Employees should trust the leadership to do the mine-sweeping. Competent and confident employees boldly go where others neglect to consider a road might exist. New horizons may be opened by such courageous workers. Open channels for communication must exist if the organization is to grow to its fullest height.

Leadership for today's schools

Lew Rhodes, formerly the Executive Director of AASA, aptly describes the TQM process as MTQ-Management for Total Quality (Rhodes, 1991). This is an important distinction. Individuals work in an organizational culture that allows the accomplishments of benefits for both individuals and the organization. The manager must know if the organizational culture works for the benefit of the organization or against it and should determine if the culture has been established by designed or just happened. The manager should also ascertain whether the culture is well-defined orhas been vague. Since all organizations havea great deal of emphasis must be placed on understanding and using the organizational culture (Sashkin & Kiser, 1991).

Individual behavior is significantly influenced by the culture of the organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). In considering the modification of the dynamic components of an organization the social scientist must understand more than the awesome potency of its culture. Also vital is an understanding of human nature and how it typically responds when confronted with the concept of change. Only by understanding that real change also involves dealing with member's deep-seated motivations can the organizational architect form a cast to mold and shape a strong, unified culture. The importance of understanding and using shared values and beliefs cannot be underestimated in the school improvement process. We are reminded that in order for an organization to be placed in a win-win situation "We have to be aware of the culture ...More powerful than a psychological contract is a social contract... And what we call 'shared values' is merely making implicit kinds of norms explicit-- 'This is how we do things around here'". (Covey, 1991, p. 209) Adversarial cultures can be managed if they are understood (Covey, 1991, p. 228)

School administrators must invest efforts in school improvement by working to improve school culture. There must be a marriage of school improvement with the school's culture. How can the linkage take place? What considerations must be made by school leaders? Who must take the lead in the effort?

Principals shape, facilitate, and foster the development of norms, values, and beliefs. These elements intimately shape the school's culture, ethos, and climate (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Certainly school improvement studies list the overwhelming importance of a strong leader (Duttweiler, 1988). Understanding culture in schools becomes paramount after examining the characteristics of effective schools. Effective schools have a culture characterized by a widely shared understanding of what is and *what ought to be* symbolized in student, teacher, and administrator behavior. What sets the highly achieving schools apart from the less effective is not simply the presence of particular norms and values, but the fact that most members support the norm in work and deed (Firestone & Corbett, 1988).

School leaders must understand the cultural concept if they are to improve the status quo. Changing the way things are done in schools implies that attitudes and beliefs of individuals must be altered. Change models which address concerns of individuals in organizations provide insight by recognizing and dealing with concerns of individuals who make up organizations. The underlying human system must allow for real change to take place.

It is important to reiterate that change takes time. To modify attitudes and beliefs is no simplistic task. The model for changing the culture in the educational organization is likened to building a forest fire by nurturing a slow burning bed of embers that gradually ignites surrounding

consumables. There is simply no "flash in the pan".

Schools can improve and become more successful by controlling and improving the organizational culture of systems. Studies have shown that "better schools" have a culture where teachers enjoy work and help establish a disciplined environment. Those schools also "expect" their students to achieve (Kritek, 1986). Organizational leaders must realize and accept the existence of the power of group culture. Two points must be explored. The first is of prime importance to the practitioners in educational leadership roles: How does knowledge of culture change the role of the leader? The second concerns what happens to organizations which do not understand and control their common culture.

To be a change-agent, the leader must understand the culture of an organization and its various components. There is a need to understand cultural dynamics. The leader will have a much greater chance of enacting meaningful school reforms or improvement efforts if he or she: (1) understands culture and works to address the concerns of individuals whom it controls; (2) knows how to interpret symbols and meanings; (3) manipulates and links cultural strands; and (4) communicates the cultural meanings to the membership of the organization. As an example, by targeting the climate of a school for improvement and diligently nurturing the new climate, the culture of the organization will slowly adapt and become instilled as the norm. Bennis (1984) reminds us that:

> ... vision, purposes, beliefs, and other aspects of organizational culture are of prime importance. Symbolic expression becomes the major tool of leadership, and leadership effectiveness is no longer defined as a '9-9 grid score' or a 'system 4' position. Effectiveness is instead measured by the extent to which 'compelling vision' empowers others to excel; the extent to which meanings are found in one's work; and the extent to which individual and organization are bonded together by common commitment in a mutually rewarding symbiotic relationship.

Educators have been bombarded with an arsenal of literature advocating a quick fix by allowing shared decision-making and responsibility. Unfortunately this literature does not address a common-denominator for school improvement. School leaders read that if they utilize simple delegation processes for reform, the members of the organization will become revitalized and work toward school improvement. The literature base substantially reinforces the notion that group members will become more productive--for a while. However, to maintain the thrust for school improvement, a cyclical chain of events must be forged. School improvement efforts must be tied to a base of knowledge that addresses the recognition and manipulation of organizational culture. Until school improvement efforts connect up with a "cultural" master-link, long-term, meaningful change will be an unlikely event. While many models for school improvement are available to help practitioners, few utilize analytical instrumentation to isolate and scrutinize the inherent organizational culture of the membership. By examining the shared beliefs and values of organizational members it is possible to chart, analyze and strategically plan for organizational improvement. Again, any effective plan for organizational improvement must impact both individual and organizational goals.

Instrumentation is available for describing organizational culture. One such instrument is the "Culture Analysis Questionnaire"© (SAGE, 1990). The analysis provided by utilizing the instrument displays information relative to four Cultural Clusters: *(1) Collegiality; (2) Confidence; (3) Competence; and, (4) Customs.* The instrument provides information in two dimensions: (1) Strength and, (2) Congruence. The information provided is both **Descriptive** and **Prescriptive** and can be used to help provide valuable insight into an organization. By

utilizing both visual and numerical representation of an average response, **and** representation of group variance, a more holistic picture of organizational culture is possible.

Resources must be channeled to understand and then use the understanding of Organizational Culture to create a quality school. To effect meaningful and lasting change in any organization there must be change in the belief structure of the members of the organization. Processes must be internalized by staff members which allow change to occur in the way things have been and are being done in the organization. The big picture, the total organization or system, lives as a cultural entity and must be viewed and changed as such or educational improvement will never become a reality until we understand and use the power of Educational Corporate Culture to help us achieve our end.

In order to make meaningful and lasting change in organizations, change agents (those who are leading the change initiative) must take into account the stages of concern of individuals who must go through the change. Organizational change will only occur person-by-person. As individuals are taken through the change process they will have questions and concerns which deserve answers and which must be answered before they can move to higher levels of implementation. Communication among all concerned parties must be a priority issue. Leaders must understand that it is to be expected that those implementing change will be frustrated, even angry, about change. By understanding and planning for change there is a greater chance that individuals will accept and implement change. However, it is important to note that lasting organizational change will only occur when the collective belief systems of individuals who make up the organization change so that the "change" becomes the "norm". Until that "new norm" has

been established, long term change simply will not happen. It is crucial that change-agents and leaders understand and plan for organizational change through changing the organizational culture. Change in the organizational culture should be accomplished by a planned process.

Purpose of This Study

It is evident that a powerful impact can be made on an educational organization if school leaders understand and then begin to mold the culture of their organization. Although it is doubtful that one can extrapolate meaning from one organization's culture and simply apply that understanding to another (Cochran, 1990) it is equally clear that organizations do have cultures which can be described and that those descriptive data may then be used prescriptively. For the past five years descriptive data have been collected from high schools, junior high and middle schools, and elementary schools which relate to cultural norms identified by Saphier and King (1985). The intent of this paper is to provide disaggregated data by school level to reflect descriptive differences and similarities in the culture of schools as noted by level. The basic question investigated in this study is whether or not school level has any relationship to cultural norms, i.e., do elementary schools have cultural norms different from junior high schools? Do secondary schools have different cultural norms different from elementary? This examination may assist the school leader by providing baseline norms for comparison purposes in school improvement efforts.

Methodology

The Sample

The sample for this study consisted of self-selected schools who desired to use the Cultural Analysis Questionnaire (CAQ) to describe their existing school culture for purposes of school improvement. During a period of approximately five years data were collected from three states and represented 33 elementary schools, 10 junior high/middle schools, and 14 high schools. Data collected are not meant to be generalized to other organizations since the notion of generalizability is counter to the belief that all organizations have unique cultures. However, the data collected do provide a database for comparison. This descriptive study simply provides data and process which might assist other organizations in understanding their own system's cultural components. The sample reported in this study represent only certified teachers in the respective systems. Other data are available which reflect the perspective of support staff members at the various sites but this paper focuses only on certified teachers.

The Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the Cultural Analysis Questionnaire (© Sage, 1990) (CAQ) developed by Dr. John L. Cochran as a doctoral dissertation project (Cochran, 1990). Cochran's research provided an instrument which allowed for the examination of organizational culture through two dimensions and thus allows a clearer picture of the shared belief system which makes up the organization. Cochran's instrument was validated for content validity and analysis of the instrument through quantitative means demonstrated that it measured the domains through discriminate items.

The instrument allows for a two-dimensional analysis of the organization in twelve cultural norm areas represented by four clusters and displays the analysis based on the factors of strength of responses indicated by arithmetic means and of variance of responses as indicated by standard deviation. Such an examination utilizing two dimensions provides a way to effectively describe the "shared beliefs" of members of an organization. By examining the strength assigned from values of 1 to 5 with 1 representing a high value and 5 representing a low value, and then further examining each norm to discover the amount of variance, again with the understanding that the lower the variance, the lower the group varied in response, users are able to see how closely they are together on whatever rating they assigned in each of the categories. The instrument provides a series of five questions for each of twelve cultural norms and further provides compiled responses for each of the four clusters represented. For each display, both an arithmetic mean, represented by a label "Strength" factor and a standard deviation, represented by a"Variance" factor, are provided. Through an examination of the data using the two dimensions a clearer picture of the responses may be achieved and a stronger measure of the organizational culture may be accomplished.

Data and Analysis

Data presented in this study were collected from 33 elementary schools, 10 junior high and middle schools, and 14 high schools and represented districts from the states of Oklahoma, South Dakota, and New Mexico.

Elementary schools had a collective "n" of 636 respondents who represented 33 sites from 13 districts located in the three states. Data for middle and junior high school staff had a

collective "n" of 232 respondents and represented 12 sites from 12 districts and from 3 states. High School representation consisted of a collective " n" of 315 received from 12 sites in 12 districts representing 3 states.

The data displayed in this paper represent averages of all of the respondents for each category and do not reflect weighted averages. In other words, the average from each site was simply averaged with other sites without taking into account the "n" from each site.

Analysis of the data is descriptive and is based on observable differences in the data. The researchers felt that quantitative analysis should not be accomplished due to the descriptive nature of the topic-- culture. However, a simple t-test evaluated at the .05 level was utilized for descriptive purposes to look for statistically significant differences among the three levels; the researchers used the analysis only to determine if the three distinct levels of organizations, viewed in the context presented, had statistically significant ratings for the categories . The data were analyzed only in terms of the three groups, elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools; and the groups were analyzed separately in terms of strength and congruence. No generalization of the data should be made to other similar organizations due to the nature of the topic. Previous research supports the contention that each organization has a unique and individual culture and that the focus on gathering and analyzing data from a cultural survey is toward understanding the culture that is present in each unique site. Data are displayed in Table 1: Cultural Norms for Schools. Results of the t-test for each group are indicated below.

Results of t-test Analysis

Comparison of Strength Factors of Elementary and Middle/Junior High Schools

Strength	Variance
p=.00	p=.00

Comparison of Strength Factors of Middle/Junior High Schools

Strength	Variance
p=.01	p<.05

Comparison of Strength Factors of Elementary and High Schools

Strength	Variance
p=.00	p=.00

[Insert Cultural Norms for Schools-- Table 1]

Conclusions

Distinct differences exist among the four clusters and respective norms for the three levels of schools examined. The results of the t-tests performed on the data indicate that at p level of significance = .05, each of the organizations vary significanlty from the others. Further, a cursory examination of the data in Table 1 notes a pattern which indicates that elementary school faculties, for the Strength factor of the items, rate each of the clusters somewhat higher (lower scores assigned) than their middle school/junior high school counterparts, and the junior high/middle school faculties rate the clusters higher than high school faculties. The same results hold true for the variability of the responses. In instances where the Strength factors are similar for two groups, such as the instance of the value of 2.5 assigned to the Competency cluster by the junior

Cultural Norms for Schools

		Elementary School Staff n=636, 33 groups, 13 districts, 3 states		Middle/Jr High School Staff n=232, 12 groups, 12 districts, 3 states		High School Staff n=316, 12 groups, 12 districts, 3 states	
		High Low 1 2 3 4 5	High Low 1 2 3 4 5	High Low 1 2 3 4 5	High Low 1 2 3 4 5	High Low 1 2 3 4 5	High Low 1 2 3 4 5
		Strength	Congruence	Strength	Congruence	Strength	Congruence
Cluster 1:	***Collegiality***	**2.53**	**1.04**	**2.69**	**1.06**	**2.82**	**1.09**
	The measure of						
	Recognition	2.67	1.07	2.87	1.09	2.89	1.13
	Celebration	2.48	1.02	2.59	1.03	2.80	1.07
	Open Communication	2.45	0.99	2.62	1.02	2.75	1.00
Cluster 2:	***Confidence***	**2.41**	**1.09**	**2.62**	**1.03**	**2.62**	**1.12**
	The measure of						
	Trust	2.42	0.96	2.64	0.99	2.62	0.97
	Decision Making Involvement	2.44	1.17	2.70	1.10	2.73	1.25
	Professional Discretion	2.35	1.12	2.49	0.99	2.51	1.07
Cluster 3:	***Competence***	**2.36**	**1.03**	**2.50**	**0.97**	**2.50**	**1.12**
	The measure of						
	Grasp for New Knowledge/Technology	2.31	0.99	2.54	0.94	2.64	0.97
	Tangible Support	2.56	0.98	2.56	0.89	2.48	1.26
	Experimentation	2.22	0.95	2.41	0.99	2.39	0.92
Cluster 4:	***Customs***	**2.46**	**0.98**	**2.65**	**1.02**	**2.75**	**1.02**
	The measure of						
	Staff Expectations	2.72	0.88	2.91	0.99	3.05	0.92
	Protection of What is Valued & Important	2.32	0.93	2.43	0.91	2.49	0.98
	Student Traditions & Common Customs	2.36	1.02	2.60	1.02	2.71	1.07

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high/middle school faculties and the same average response for the high school faculties, it is noted that the Congruence factor is quite different (.97 for junior high/middle school compared to 1.12 for high schools).

Data collected supports contentions voiced throughout the years by educators who have indicated that high school teachers tend to be more isolated from their peers and may not share experiences with their colleagues. This data seems to fit the description of "wild centers" espoused by Shils (1961), who wrote that such centers will develop if a unity of direction is not provided by leadership.

Information such as the type available through a two-dimensional culture survey is valuable to school administrators as they plan for change. Leaders must know where staff members are in agreement and where they vary; and they must have data to understand if the beliefs present are the set of beliefs necessary to help the organization accomplish the journey desired.

The initial data presented in Table I will be useful as benchmark data, although not necessarily for indicating best practice; it is useful data for comparison to "the norm". Leaders now have access to data which can assist them as they develop school improvement plans.

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